

*Visible Voices: Translating Verse into Script & Print 3000 BC – AD 2000.* By NICOLAS BARKER.

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Deriving from two lecture series, Nicolas Barker's bravura study of the textual condition of verse spans five millennia of transmission in Greco-Latin culture, its antecedents, and its descendents. Chapter 1 considers pre-alphabetic cultures in which verse was one of several mnemonic aids, and sets the tone for what follows: wide-ranging, pithy, and densely (and invaluable) illustrated reflections on '[t]he loss and gain in translation from spoken to written verse' (p. 4). In a long-range exploration of early writing systems and their diverse material contexts, Barker observes that the role of patterning in monumental inscriptions – parallelism, repetition, and the like – is apparent as early as the third millennium BCE, and that scribal aids to repetition are attested c.1200 BCE. Chapter 2 addresses the development of alphabets and of the codex. The development of an apparatus to aid both reading and performance is deftly sketched, from the rarity of lineation and punctuation in early Hebrew Psalm witnesses to the organization of text *per cola et commata* and the use of *litteræ notabiliores* that develops in patristic manuscripts. The relationship between the visual presentation of Latin and vernacular material in medieval Europe is the focus of Chapter 3. Developments in visual organization, such as variation in letters' size and colour, run parallel to shifts in the forms and functions of verse. Barker strikingly brings out the variety of ways in which scribes articulate formal features on the page, providing a wide enough range of examples for specialist readers to identify intriguing cross-cultural parallels. The braced rhymes of some Latin verse (pp.52-53) foreshadow *rhétoriqueur* formal experimentation some two centuries later, while the mnemonic qualities of verse – noted at the outset of Barker's survey – resurface as he considers the innovations of late medieval manuscript layouts (pp. 73-74). Chapter 4 traces the development of presentational and compositional techniques after the advent of printing. Manuscripts continue to attract close attention: as Barker notes, printing increased the speed and durability of presentational changes but did not initiate them (pp. 83-84).

Accordingly, there is a useful overview of the differing attitudes that various early modern poets adopted towards manuscript and print transmission. The two media remain interdependent as the hand-press period continues, as Chapter 5 reminds us. This chapter relies much more heavily than its predecessors on English material (in linguistic and/or geographical terms), a contrast that doubtless reflects the different remits of Barker's original lectures. After the impressively cosmopolitan surveys in the preceding chapters this comes as a minor disappointment, though it is compensated by highly illuminating comments on the orthography and punctuation of Marvell's poetry (pp. 112-13), and on Pope's relationship with the aesthetics, technology, and economics of printing (pp. 114-18). The closing chapter, somewhat less Anglophone in scope, outlines the shifting relationships between verse and the page – and, eventually, the screen – from the late eighteenth century onwards. We encounter some intriguing examples of 'intelligent dialogue between printer and poet' (p. 134) that indicate careful proof-reading by poets such as Scott and Coleridge, as well as some rather less effective processes of manuscript-to-print transmission for Byron and Keats. The chapter closes by briefly treating the impact of the typewriter and digital media on composition (in the creative rather than the typographical sense), particularly in the context of picture poems (pp. 153-59).

In such an ambitious enterprise, the occasional Homeric nod is inevitable. Occitan poetic manuscripts are less rare than is suggested (pp. 70-71): some forty *chansonniers*, including fragments, are extant. Conversely, the personal manuscript of Charles d'Orléans is erroneously termed a *chansonnier* (p. 71), while the full title of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* is incorrectly rendered (pp. 149, 152). More common are continuity errors reflecting the transmission from lecture to book, particularly where the verbal account presupposes an illustrative image that has not been supplied (p. 152). Comments on Clément Marot's 1529 *Roman de la Rose* edition (p. 83) are appropriately illustrated, but omit the work's title; this is particularly confusing because the example figures immediately after a reference to Villon, whom Marot also edited. Such lapses, however, are minor, and do not detract from Barker's deeply impressive ability to connect so

many material and aesthetic issues that are normally treated in isolation. No less important is his expert management of examples, which balances the clarity of a necessarily selective exposition with attentiveness to the diversity of layout and punctuation in sources. Hence readers are tacitly encouraged to draw parallels or contrasts with other poetry that they may have encountered, perhaps in very different periods or languages. This, then, is Barker's fundamental achievement: to refresh his audience's engagement with poetry, and with the written and printed page.

*Queen Mary University of London*

ADRIAN ARMSTRONG